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SAVE UP TO $209 IN COUPON SAVINGS

RESEARCHERS TARGET A TINY INSECT THAT IS SPREADING DISEASE THROUGH CITRUS GROVES

Biopesticide could be key to protecting trees

Amanda Morris Arizona Republic | USA TODAY NETWORK

In the next few months, James Truman will plant over 400 new citrus trees on his Surprise farm. ▮ Many of the trees on his farm are puny things. As he strides among them to check for signs of stress, the 6-foot-3 farmer towers over each tree, each one a skinny bundle of branches and leaves supported by stakes in the ground. ▮ It will take several years before they mature into fruit-bearing trees and 20 years for them to reach full fruit production.

"You lose a lot every time you lose a tree, so if you have a disease come in and stun a bunch of trees in your operation .... it could be quite devastating," Truman said.

Truman is worried about the risk of one disease in particular: citrus greening disease. It's fast-spreading, hard to detect, and lethal for trees.

"Once you have it," Truman said, "you're screwed."

The disease has already decimated citrus groves in the other major citrus-producing states of Florida, California and Texas. According to John Caravetta, the associate director of the Arizona Department of Agriculture, the disease has also spread to Mexico.

"We're surrounded," he said.

Though the microscopic insect that transmits the disease, the Asian citrus psyllid, has been found across Arizona, he said the disease hasn't been detected within the state yet, making it a rare haven for citrus trees.

The state wants to keep it that way.

See CITRUS, Page 4A

TOP: John Babiarz stands among trees at his Greenfield Citrus Nursery in Mesa in February. MICHAEL CHOW AND THOMAS HAWTHORNE/THE REPUBLIC

ABOVE: James Truman inspects a young citrus tree on his Surprise farm for signs of stress. He will plant 400 new trees in the next few months and hopes to keep his farm free of citrus greening disease. AMANDA MORRIS/THE REPUBLIC

COVID-19 IN ARIZONA

Patients left in limbo while health system finances drain

Stephanie Innes and Alison Steinbach
Arizona Republic
USA TODAY NETWORK

As hospitals prepare for a surge of patients ill from COVID-19, physician and dental offices across Arizona are sitting empty, patients are learning that upcoming surgeries are canceled, and some health care workers are facing job cuts and furloughs.

Emergency room traffic is down, patient volumes are down, and for hospitals, expenses are way up — they've been ordered to increase their bed capacity, and they're scrambling for supplies. Leaders at Northern Arizona Healthcare say the cost of a single N95 mask prior to the pandemic was 69 cents. Now, they're $8 each.

What's going on in health care right now is what Phoenix internal medicine physician Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser calls a "perfect storm" of stress on the health care system because of the expected COVID-19 patients and an economic shutdown that has affected businesses everywhere, including the health care infrastructure. Regular health care in Arizona has all but ground to a halt.

See PATIENTS, Page 14A

USA TODAY

Governors around US work together toward reopening their economies

Governors around the U.S. began collaborating on plans Tuesday to reopen their economies in what is likely to be a drawn-out, step-by-step process to prevent the coronavirus from rebounding with disastrous results.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom has joined a coalition with his West Coast counterparts in Oregon and Washington. A similar coalition has taken shape in the Northeast, encompassing Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.

The governors' actions set up a potential showdown with President Donald Trump, who insisted Monday that he has "total" authority to decide how and when to loosen restrictions in the country.

Story, Page 6A

GRAD DAY NEARS VALLEY & STATE, 3A

Twin sisters Kassidy, left, and Kaprice Faraci pick up caps and gowns on Tuesday at Skyline High School in Mesa. DAVID WALLACE/THE REPUBLIC

Ducey is open to hosting Major League Baseball

Gov. Doug Ducey is open to the idea of Arizona hosting all 30 teams should Major League Baseball want to play its season in empty spring training parks. **1B**

State jobless claims grow

In Arizona, 95,382 additional people applied for jobless benefits last week, bringing the four-week total to 345,800, the state reported Monday. **17A**

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